

The Department of Toxic Substances Control Priorities Fact Sheet

The Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) places a great deal of importance on making our department's information readily available and easy to understand. While we base our decisions on complex laws and highly technical science and engineering, we are obligated to explain those decisions to any and all who choose to monitor or involve themselves in our decision-making processes. Our goal is to make it easier for everyone to quickly locate information about hazardous wastes and substances that is timely, accurate, and of consistently high quality.

Below are some of the priority issues we see challenging us now and in the future.

The electorate passed bond measures that will give California 500 more schools by the year 2004, with more to follow. Since all proposed school sites receiving State funding for acquisition or construction are required to go through a rigorous environmental review and cleanup process under DTSC's oversight, our department is very much a part of realizing the State's goal of decreasing class size. In just over two years since we assumed this responsibility, we have reviewed environmental documents for 1,000 schools.

Brownfields Reuse

DTSC has integrated existing programs and developed a number of new tools to facilitate reuse of brownfields properties in California. Brownfields are properties that are contaminated, or thought to be contaminated, and are underutilized due to perceived remediation costs and liability concerns. Redeveloping urban brownfields properties optimizes the use of existing infrastructure and protects our precious green space resources.

Recycling Military Facilities

DTSC oversees the investigation and cleanup of contaminated California properties currently or previously owned and operated by the various branches within the federal Department of Defense. Since the late 1980s, the federal government has closed 29 major and several other minor installations in California. In addition to the usual hazardous substance releases found at properties once used for industrial purposes, the cleanup of military facilities is frequently compounded by the presence of unexploded ordnance. DTSC is recognized nationally as a leader in devising ways to address this very difficult problem.

Enforcement

DTSC monitors hazardous waste transfer, storage, treatment and disposal facilities for illegal activity, including electronic manifest surveillance and monitoring registered hazardous waste haulers. DTSC takes appropriate enforcement action against hazardous waste handlers when they violate hazardous waste requirements. Because of the complexity of hazardous waste laws, DTSC provides compliance assistance and

emphasizes making its enforcement program clear and consistent. Another critical element of DTSC's successful enforcement program is our focus on ensuring that those who handle hazardous waste have sufficient financial mechanisms in place to either respond to a release or to close their facility safely.

Targeted Regulatory Focus

DTSC has the legal authority and responsibility to create regulations that further its mission of protecting human health and the environment. Increasingly, DTSC uses this authority to control or influence the use and management of particularly dangerous substances such as mercury, lead, and chemicals that can be used to create weapons of mass destruction. Our multi-disciplinary technical experts and laboratories are on the forefront of research to assess the sources of these substances, and identify appropriate management standards and non-hazardous alternatives. Additionally, as we address these substances with our regulations, we work closely with affected industries to devise implementation processes to minimize unnecessary adverse impacts on commerce and California's economy.

Pollution Prevention

California is best protected from the dangers associated with hazardous waste when that waste is not created in the first place. DTSC's pollution prevention focuses on that part of the environmental equation by working with State and local agencies, businesses large and small and non-governmental agencies to offer source reduction, reuse, and recycling to promote pollution prevention. In addition, we integrate pollution prevention strategies throughout our programs, in both the regulatory and operational sense. From inspectors in our regional offices and scientists in the Hazardous Materials Laboratories, to clerical staff in headquarters, everyone works toward reducing hazardous substances, limiting waste, and preserving the environment.

Public Participation and Environmental Justice

Since its inception, DTSC actively has engaged communities throughout California on site cleanups and permit determinations. DTSC invites comments from all interested people on key decisions, always going to the affected community to engage in various forms of dialogue. In all cases our project teams are sensitive to cultural issues, language and educational levels. Environmental Justice is defined as equal environmental protection for all California communities without regard to race, culture or income. DTSC has an interim environmental justice policy in place that states, in part: "(DTSC) is committed to ensuring that all of the state's population, without regard to color, national origin or income, is equally protected from adverse human or environmental effects as a result of the Department's policies, programs or activities." We will look for further opportunities to instill the principles of environmental justice into our projects and processes.

These are just a few of our priorities to highlight for you. DTSC's core work involves many other important elements. We invite you to find out more about our programs by visiting our website at www.dtsc.ca.gov.